



KENTUCKY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE
No. 16-064

July 14, 2016

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PRUITT TESTIFIES BEFORE SENATE COMMITTEE ON EVERY STUDENT SUCCEEDS ACT (ESSA); CALLS ON STATES TO BE EMPOWERED TO DESIGN EDUCATION SYSTEMS THAT FOCUS ON ALL STUDENTS

(FRANKFORT, Ky.) – Kentucky Education Commissioner Stephen Pruitt testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions in Washington, D.C., today, commending lawmakers for passing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which will give states more flexibility in how they measure student success while also holding schools accountable for closing achievement gaps between groups of students.

“I, like many of you, believe this is both a civil rights law and an education law,” said Pruitt. “In Kentucky, we are working to move all children to higher levels of learning while also determining the root cause of achievement gaps, which we believe stem from opportunity gaps and access to rigorous, high quality learning opportunities.”

The United States Department of Education (USED) recently released proposed regulations that would govern the implementation of ESSA. USED is accepting public comment on the regulations until August 1. Pruitt testified last month about ESSA before the U.S. House Committee on Education and Workforce.

Following the Senate hearing, Pruitt met with U.S. Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky to discuss the regulations.

During today’s hearing, Pruitt said while he appreciated the department’s speed in developing the proposed regulations, he has concerns they contain many restrictions and requirements.

“...In my opinion, the proposed regulations go beyond what the statute intended. Instead of guardrails along a multi-lane highway, the proposed regulations are more like concrete barriers along a one lane road with so many restrictions and requirements, that state choices are severely limited,” he said.

Further, he said, the volume and complexity of the proposed regulations are in direct opposition to Kentuckians’ desire for a simple accountability system that would allow for a “broader, fairer and more accurate representation of school performance” versus a single summative score. He later shared with lawmakers that using a single score to rank schools in Kentucky has led to an unhealthy sense of competition rather than a collaboration and collegiality that supports school improvement.

(more)

Pruitt also raised concerns on the aggressive timeline proposed for implementation. Additionally he takes issue with USED asking states to identify their lowest performing schools based on their existing accountability systems, and subsequently holding those schools responsible for making progress under completely new accountability systems.

“...We feel it would be prudent to wait until the end of the 2017-18 school year to identify schools based on the measures of the new system. This would be fairer to our schools, allow a clean transition to the new system and eliminate an amalgam of the two systems during the transition year,” he said. In the meantime, Pruitt stressed, that Kentucky would continue to support currently identified low performing schools.

“Now, more than ever, what states need to implement ESSA is honest two-way communication, consistency and to be trusted to make good decisions. We need a common sense approach that supports a quality system of assessments, accountability and school improvement measures that can be implemented with fidelity and will promote doing what is right for all students,” Pruitt said.

Pruitt said he is concerned that may not happen if a compliance mentality prevails. Specifically, he noted the difference between assurances required under the law and the evidence required in the proposed regulations to support the peer review process. While the peer review process can be helpful, Pruitt said he is concerned it will result in overwhelming paperwork for states as well as be “subjective, will result in inconsistent interpretations of the law, and may allow the department (USED) to promote its agenda outside of the regulatory process.”

“Kentucky is committed to fully realizing the Congressional intent of ESSA. If this law truly represents a new day for education in America, states must have the support to take action based on quality and what is best for students and move away from the compliance mentality,” Pruitt said. “The Commonwealth of Kentucky looks forward to revised standards that empower states with the freedom to plan, innovate, design and implement quality education systems that will ensure opportunity for all students and promote the pillars of equity, achievement and integrity within Kentucky education policy.”

The commissioner’s oral testimony can be accessed [here](#). Pruitt also provided more in-depth and detailed written comments to the committee, which can be found [here](#).

The full hearing can be seen at <http://www.help.senate.gov/hearings/essa-implementation-perspectives-from-education-stakeholders-on-proposed-regulations>.

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